

F

459

h68116

In
Abe Lincoln's
Town

Claude Hudgins





Class F 459

Book H 68 H 8

Copyright N^o _____

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.

“IN
ABE LINCOLN’S
TOWN”



Published by the Author
Hodgenville, Ky.

COPYRIGHT 1915
BY
CLAUDE HUDGINS

100
AUG 21 1915

©CL.A 410179

no.

I.

To a Hodgenvillian there is no more interesting subject than the "burg" and its people. Indeed, to a great many of us who have always lived in the confines of her corporate limits, it's about the only place on the map. To us all roads lead to Hodgenville, and the sky comes down to the ground equally distant from all points of the compass. But to you who have traveled far and wide, it may have occurred ere this, that there are lots of towns as big as Hodgenville.

It must be admitted there are no great sky-scrapers towering into the heavens like other great seaports; nor do we have our streets paved with brick or other hard substance;

nor are the streets we have cut up and obstructed with the ever noisy street cars. But we have purer air, brighter sunshine, and happier hearts. We are not annoyed with the ever rush of business, and yet "we all" have plenty, and live about as easy as people who live in larger places. We are not so large but that we are blessed with a knowledge of everybody, and almost everybody's affairs; nor so crowded with our own business but that we have as much time, if not more, to devote to other people's business as we do to our own.

For indeed, in small towns things to talk about and think about are so scarce that when Sam is caught holding Mary Ann's hand, it spreads over town like wild fire or some contagious disease, and like fire and disease, it gets bigger the further it goes. Town gossip, like mental telep-

athy, travels from the firesides of our homes down the streets, around the corners, up the alleys, and into the back doors of our stores and business houses. Little lies and imaginations, in their rapid flight over the city, are transformed as if by magic into living truths, and the dirtiest meanest things that are ever done or said, live and are handed down by tradition from generation to generation. Somebody’s chickens get into somebody’s back yard, then there is a fuss, hard words, bitter feelings, and life-time enemies. One mother thinks her daughter more accomplished than her neighbor’s, or that her son, William Henry, is too good to keep company with Susan Jane, or that Ada Gray is trying her best to marry Thomas Felix, just as though the poor girl should not want to mar-

ry, and that it is a sin to think of such a thing.

To one who has always lived in a small town, and is familiar with its history from observation and actual experience, the ordinary happenings are nothing unusual, but it is otherwise to the man up a tree.

II.

Did you ever go down the street on a rainy Sunday night after the lights were out? Man alive! You can talk to me about the ace of spades and black cats, but they are nothing. Why, you can’t find your way from one corner to the other. My, but how your heels do pop on the concrete! And you see streaks of light from some upstairs window glaring across the street like ghosts on the wall. You ought to get up about 4 o’clock some Monday morning, and go down through town, and see how empty, vacant and deserted your streets look. It seems like everybody has left town and taken their things with them. And then you ought to walk up to the top of the

hill, and stand tip-toe on the brink of the horizon, and watch the morning shoot sunbeams at the vanishing night.

The red sun heaves a shoulder up above Muldrough's Hill, and stares sleepily along Nolyn Valley. For a moment he hangs there, glancing carelessly, with the vague and depressing stare of a man who is tired, at the little town, Hodgenville.

A carriage from Buffalo, bent on catching the early train to Louisville, dashes down the hill and turns hurriedly toward the depot. A lean house cat, picking its way across the street like a thief returning from a midnight prowling, hears the rumble of the carriage, bristles up, takes to its heels, and scrambles hastily over the fence.

The people of the village are beginning to stir about. Albert, the

hotel porter, carries out a pan of ashes and dumps it into a barrel at the side of the pavement. This done he straightens up, and wonders vaguely where he can find that drink of whisky, that matutinal thirst quencher which he must have each morning on his dreary road to Tophet. About this time the hack for the train backs up to the hotel door, and three tired, discouraged, underpaid prune peddlers hurry out with their grips and grumblingly climb aboard. I can see those drummers as plain as day. I don’t know any of them, but I know they are there, and would not be making the jerk-water towns unless they were discouraged. They have no faith in themselves, no faith in their goods, and, of course, no faith in God or the future, for if they live to be old men they will still be peddling groceries, if they

are that lucky. No wonder they grumble.

Over across the square, and from God knows where at this early hour, comes Sip Simsette jingling a bunch of keys in his pocket, and whistling a foolish tune. Down the street clerks are beginning to unlock their stores. Strutting along like a peacock comes Pewee McAdoo with his arms akimbo, because he will wear those high-waisted pants, and so on down to the store he goes. Arriving there he unlocks the door, and there exudes into the street a perfected maelstrom of blended odors. The smell of tobacco, spices, stale cabbage, and decaying vegetables all rush out in a commingled stream of sickening stench.

The sun is high now and hot. Fanning himself with his hat, there emerges from the hotel entrance a

tall young man with long curly hair. Out on the pavement he halts irresolutely for a second, wipes the perspiration from his forehead, lights his cigar, and then with the determined tread of one who has just decided some momentous question, he goes across the square, unlocks the door of a tiny law office and seats himself at a littered desk. Wearily, and with the least possible show of interest, he picks up first one paper and another, toying aimlessly with each for a second, then discards it. He is busy trying to keep busy on a little two-by-four matter that would scarce detain the attention for a minute of a well-trained claim clerk. But this young man is a lawyer, and must perforce, instill into every little action the gravest possible import.

By this time Public Square is at its busiest. Over across on the far side

a farmer is tying his team. From the pavement below him a hog rises from his wallow, and scrapes his muddy side against the concrete walks. Flies swarm about the window, and out in the square below the heat is well nigh unbearable. Passing beneath the window and so on around the square goes Sip Simsette in his aimless ramble, still vigorously jingling his bunch of keys, and whistling his endless roundelay.

Seated there at the "aforesaid" littered desk, the young lawyer sizes it all up. He knows that yesterday made to-day and that they both will make to-morrow, and it is a wonder he doesn't grow tired of it all. But this is life—"To do without avail the decent ordered tasks of every day. Nay,—I'd rather see the rebel stark against his country's laws, or God's own mad lover dying on a kiss."

III.

On yonder corner stand some men talking to one another in a low whisper. You can tell from their maneuvers that it is something secret. It has the tinge of an undermining plot. Look, how they glance around with a nervous uneasy air as if they might fear some one overhearing them. Not a great way off stands another bunch of men, they belong to the other faction; and each thinks the success of their interest depends upon the others failure and extinction. Listen, they are saying mean slanderous things about the parties to the other side. Watch both factions for a few days; go with them through their every day life; don’t look just at their outward garb of

policy, but look also at their acts behind the curtain, their innermost souls, and see how they cut and slash and ill-wish each other. See how each side will try to quash every undertaking, though for the best interest of the community; they are against it because the other side, or some member of the other side, started it.

A young man sees the necessity of a public improvement, and with no personal interest, other than bettering his town, undertakes the organization of a good school, or the construction of concrete sidewalks, or the installment of a water plant. He meets with some encouragement and goes on. After devoting a year's time and much hard work, the undertaking is at last accomplished. There it is, a grand success, a step toward progress that the town should be

proud of,—a lasting benefit to all posterity. This young man who first started the move, did not do it all ’tis true; but he put it on foot and kept it moving to completion, a necessary function that no one else dared to do. What does he get for his time and labor? Five hundred thousand knocks and curses, and hounded to his grave! He didn’t expect pay for his labor, nor honor for his glory, but he might have been left to die in peace. But what would painter do, or what would poet or saint, but for the crucifixions and hells? And ever more in the world is this marvelous balance of beauty and disgust, magnificence and rats. Not Antonius, but a poor washer-woman said, “The more trouble, the more lion; that’s my principle.”

I came down town last night, and near the Court House in Public

Square, I saw a crowd of men and boys talking loud; some with angry faces were threatening and swearing, others looked scared and were trembling, as if undetermined whether to run or fall dead. One of them grabs another by the collar and says, "You low down scoundrel beast, I'll kill you." A lick is struck, and that followed by another, down they come rolling and tumbling in the mud. A low cry is heard, and then it is all over. Somebody is hurt! His hot red blood is running down the gutter. Next morning in Police Court the wounded man pays his "eight sixty," the other left on the early train, and that is the end of it. The curtain is lowered on this scene, and nothing more happens till some team gets frightened and runs away; then everybody comes out on the street to see a human being killed; but there

is no human being in it, and the team whirls down the street like a cyclone, and you think every little dirty-faced boy in town is running off with it.

The lean hungry figure of one “Beeky” Fitch can be seen straggling along the street as unconcerned as if all eternity was before him. He has a sad dejected look this “Beeky” has, that arouses your suspicion of a misfortune in some deep-rooted love affair. However, the little fellow seems to have his part of the fun, for now and then you can see him expedite his momentum, give a squall that would humiliate an African lion, and pick up his heels with infantile alacrity. In short, he sees some sport and is hastening to it. Some fifteen or twenty lads are congregated in a game or fight. In that bunch of youngsters may be seen

John, Willie, Clyde, and Daniel; and from the noise they are making, you would think about seventeen thousand other dirty-faced urchins. You can't tell what they are doing, but they are evidently having the time of their lives. Occasionally one of them falls, or is knocked to the ground, and he gets up all muddy, but he is after another boy in an instant, with all the vim and vigor in him. Then he laughs, and then they all laugh and yell loud enough to tear their little lungs out.

And yet, notwithstanding malformation, worthless characters, and rotten cabbage, Hodgenville, like other places, is undergoing the changes of time. Her buildings are being built higher; her streets retolled and extended further out; old houses are torn down and new ones built in their places; old settlers die, and move

away, and new ones come in and take their places; young boys and girls grow into manhood and womanhood with some improvement over their predecessors — they dress better, know more, and have less. Hodgenville’s schools are being enlarged, her church steeples are climbing higher into the heavens and extending the shadow of their good influences further and further out into the surrounding evils. The signs of the times are that Hodgenville will, in time, become a God-fearing and God-loving people.

Meanwhile, the clear and serene Nolynn ripples on down the winding channel of its stream just as it did years and years ago, murmuring the same low melodies it did thousands and thousands of years before any one even thought of building a town here—when Hodgenville was but a

part of the vast tanglewoods through which it flowed, and the wild things crept out from among the big trees and under-thickets and licked their hot red tongues into it's clear cool. But time rolls on, and changes come and go, just as the waters find their way to the ocean, and then back again on the bosom of a cloud.

But you can't tell always what is going to happen till it has happened, and even then you don't know whether it is or just appears to be. The one unsolvable question that has been handed down through all the ages, is this mysterious question of life: How came we here? What are we doing, and whither goest? It is a question that all the barbarians, and the innumerable modern Christian-orthodox have disagreed in solving. The Naturalist and the Atheist have had their say. There have been hun-

dreds and thousands of volumes written upon the subject, with many good and sufficient reasons for every theory. Yet we all come back to the unsolvable mystery, How? What? and Whither? I look out on the mysteries of the great universe around me; upon the millions and millions of stars that dot the firmament of heaven in the night time. I look on all the mysteries of nature, and the mysteries of life, and I ask myself the solution of the riddle, and I bow my head in the presence of the infinite mystery, and say, I don’t know, I can’t tell. It is all a riddle, and the key to the riddle is another riddle.

Meanwhile, out in the orchard, the apple blossoms are falling lazily to the ground; the buds are unfolding into tender leaves preparatory to shade the panting flocks from the heat of another summer’s sun; the

grass is weaving its velvet green over the fields; and the old cow has already begun to switch her tail at the thoughts of future battles with the flies.

There is a meeting of the Ladies' Book Club at the Blinkenstaff home this afternoon. Some six or eight of the town swell dames have already arrived. They are very elegantly dressed, these society stars are. Personal out-shine being the object of their club, they have put on their best silks with colors that would make a peacock blush. They look like fairies, and they talk like nymphs. Every bloomin' one of them are talking at the same time, and about different subjects which they change about three times a minute; notwithstanding every one can tell all that was said, to-morrow, and more besides. They have talked about most

everything in town, except books, and they would talk about books if they could think of the names of any. Some of these ladies are better and smarter than the ordinary run of women. The very fact that they belong to the book club and wear better clothes makes them better. There are two or three in the club who think they are better than the others, for the simple reason that they are permitted to do most of the talking—Some of them don’t want to act smart. Thank God, there are some good women in a book club.

My dear Polly, you may have belonged to the book club for ten years, or have been a member of the Ladies’ Aid Society for fifteen. You may have read Cervantes, Mary J. Holmes, or Honora DeBalzac, or you may have even perused the history of ancient Rome; you may have stood upon the

topmost pinnacle of Gibraltar and gazed out on the sad and solemn sea; you may be able to tell about all these things, which is very good, and yet not be able to help one step in the advancement or progress of the world by attending to the ordinary household duties of your home. You may have a little better carriage of person, your complexion may be better, your hair trained more artistic, or your clothes hang more picturesque than women who stay at home and work; and that is very good so far as it goes, but after all, what is it worth? For how much can you cash it? How much of your ticket will it pay through St. Peter's gate? By staying in dark rooms your hands will get whiter, or by mixing and mingling in the peacock societies you may keep in touch with the gossip of the town, or by the constant prac-

tice on the dancing floor you may have more admirers; but you can build more character with a dish rag or a floor mop. Not that women should stay at home and kill themselves at work. We don’t like the man who expects that of his wife. But we love the woman who loves her home. We love the woman who is not afraid of a little work. A little work each day around the house, a little cleaning or a little dusting and arranging each day will make any woman healthier and happier than being dressed and laced all the time, on the run listening to the slanders of gossip.

What, you say this is being preached to? Oh well, I know that you must somehow live, and that it takes all kinds of people to make a world; but if everybody were to run from the things which have a tendency to

make them better men and women, this would get to be one devil of a world.

I believe the mail has come. If you will go with me to the postoffice, we will have a better point of view to observe your town's humanity. There is a bunch of it there waiting for the mail to be distributed. There are boys and girls, old men and middle-aged men. They are so crowded we will have to elbow our way in. But they will not mind that, they are good-natured, and rather enjoy being pushed and shoved around, especially the girls. Some of them are already pushing and crowding with no apparent cause other than to laugh and giggle over; they are feeling so good they are just running over with laugh. Others are engaged reading letters which they have just opened; business letters, social letters and

love letters; and you can read in the scowls and smiles of their faces, their respective tenors. While others are holding their daily papers up to the light, with some two or three looking over their shoulders, to see what has happened down in Mexico, or whether the protocol has been signed in Bulgaria. Just as if it made any difference in Hodgenville whether Bulgaria ever signed a protocol, or whether there is a Bulgaria or a protocol. On the other side of this postoffice, there are some men leaning against the wall. They are neither reading, pushing nor laughing; but are just standing there in solemn expectancy, as if they might be looking for an appointment, plenipotentiary to Peru, or for a check from the Bank of Bengal. But the check from Bengal doesn’t come; it’s just a circular from a department

store in Chicago offering shoes, men's shirts and gentlemen's neck-wear at wonderfully reduced prices.

There goes a beautiful young girl; she is just developing into womanhood. She is so clean and sweet, and looks so nice and lady-like that you think she must be a good girl. Watch her, she is about to pass a working girl. Will this well-dressed girl speak to her and smile upon her a comforting good morning? No, she passes her as coldly and unconcerned as she would a caterpillar. What is the beautiful little lady thinking of? Is it of her home, of how she can add to its beauty, or how she can relieve her dear old mother of some care? Is she thinking of her father's gray hairs, and wondering whether she caused any of them to come there? Is she thinking of suffering humanity, and planning a way by which she can

help it? Ah, I wonder what are the thoughts of this beautiful piece of innocence. Are they about religion, Sunday school? There! I see her look at herself in the show window and straighten her hair . She looks down at her skirt and beautiful little slippers. I see her smile upon some well-dressed young man. She throws her head to one side and glides along like a goddess of love. She thinks of how she looks, what the boys are thinking of her, and how she will shine at the ball to-night. She is thinking of the sensation that will run through her when her lover takes her into his arms and skips over the floor to the rythmic motion of music. Pride! Vanity! Passion!

You can see young men, too, walking our streets, with their pants freshly pressed, their shoes newly shined, hair parted in the middle, and

hats on the side of their head, walking along with an air that would lead you to believe they were worth millions, and so smart that it would not be safe to get near them, lest their heads should burst with superfluous information.

And then, there is the scene in front of the livery stable, the Aze House, and the Conn Hotel. There in the shade sits some six, eight or a dozen of the town's idlers, whittling on sticks, chairs or anything that may be handy, and talking as important and all-knowing as a man from Mars. Each one has a cigarette between his fingers or a chew of tobacco in his jaw, spitting the red juice on the pavement. They emphasize about every other word with an emphatic Hell or a blasphemus G—Dam.

In the hotel lobby are several other

classes of our town’s humanity, as well as some humanity which does not belong to our town; for there are some six or eight traveling salesmen sitting around leaning against the newly plastered walls, telling their ups and downs and their wonderful achievements. There, also, is Rastus Rabo, one of our town’s important nineteen-year-olds. He is a very wise young guy, this Rastus Rabo, for he talks as much, or a little more, than the most talkative of these traveling men. He, too, is leaning against the wall with his heels hooked in the chair round; and is continually drawing up his pant legs, lest some one might fail to notice his silk hose or the cut of his new button shoes. He is smoking a cigarette and every few minutes spits between his fingers, and then reaches down again to pull his pant legs higher, as if

they were continually and most obstinately crawling down all the time; but in fact they are almost above his knees already, and if not careful he will have them so high he will show his drawers. However, it is necessary that every one present should know that this important Rastus Rabo wears stockings instead of socks, and so it will not make much difference if he does show his drawers, if that is all he shows.

But this Rastus Rabo is very particular to say something smart in the presence of these traveling salesmen, which after all, may be very well, for one of these drummers, too, thinks he is very smart and must do a certain amount of talking. It would not be to the best interest of the better behaved of this crowd for one smart alex to conduct all the conversation lest it grow monotonous. Some

of these traveling salesmen are accustomed to these outbursts of superfluous knowledge, and are not much disturbed from their order filling. But it does not happen that all these men have orders to fill. One tall dark-complected gentleman has been sitting all this time listening to these two parrots, and to catch it all has had to sit back and say nothing. It was for him that a great deal of this big talk was made. This smart alex and Rastus think he is an amateur on the road, and that he is sitting there wishing that he were as smart as they.

Paul said, “The fool uttereth all he knows, but the wise man keepeth it in till afterwards.” And it has been said that deep water lies still, but that the devil is at the bottom. Finally, the quiet gentleman with the closed mouth opens his mouth, and

without removing his eyes from the two gibbers, addresses them:

"Young men, you seem to think you are very wise. I judge from your behavior that you think you are especially endowed by the Omnipotence to enlighten this great world which you inhabit; and that if your lamps were suddenly extinguished, everything would cease to exist; that there would be a sudden jar and a crash of the earth's axis, and this old world would fly off into chaos. But I want to say to you that it is very doubtful if any such things would happen at all, or if a single railroad company would go into bankruptcy; or that there would be one less man walk the streets of Tampaco. If either of you were to die today they would still raise wheat in Argentine and mine in Peru, to ship fruit from Los Angeles to the Tickers

of New York. Yes, sir, I have no doubt the big ships would continue to plow the ocean, and the newsboys on the streets of Liverpool would never leave off the tomtom cry, P-a-p-a-r! P-a-p-a-r!

I’ll tell you, young men, this is a great big world compared to the small part you know. As to your little world, Rastus Rabo, it does not extend much beyond the corporate limits of your town; possibly there is a narrow streak or two that runs out, like the tail of a comet, and reaches as far as Stithton, Vine Grove, or perhaps Magnolia. Either of you or both of you might be lifted up by a balloon into the ethereal regions and wafted across the deep blue sea to a foreign seaport; and you would look around with that vague and curious stare of one who is lost, and ask where you were; if told that it was Singapore,

you would not know whether you were in Jupiter or Northern Illinois."

Out in the Square, some mischievous scamp cries, "Sick, sick," when there is nothing to sick; but from four corners of the earth they come yelping. Old dogs and young dogs, town dogs and country dogs—blue, black and brindled. So many dogs, with such a variety of snaps, barks and growls that you think something has broken loose in dogdom. But dogs will be dogs, just as boys will be boys, and as soon as they discover there is "nothin' doin'," they tuck their respective tails and scatter.

Go with me, if you please, into the dead hours of night; follow me through the dark alleys, and into the back hallways and ante-chambers of some of our secret backway buildings. Take a peep through the key-

hole, or rather climb into a chair and take a look over the transom. There you will find the gambler’s den. There by the dim light of a candle you will see strong healthy men wagering over a game of chance. The excitement and anxiety has long since driven them to drink, and you can smell the whisky, beer and smoke of a gambler’s hell. We shall not go into every chamber of this building, lest we should see something that would shock our modesty, but suffice it to say, that in other rooms there are other games of vice.

Such are the frailties of a small town as well as large cities. You may think this knocking in thus detailing the iniquity and depravity of our little city, but it is here, and were it left out and only the best given, the tale would be but half told; and the truth half told is but a lie. Be-

sides, we do not climb by following the good alone, but also by avoiding the bad. There is some good in the worst of towns, and some bad in the best of them, and less bad in any of them than in large cities.

In the Public Square of this town stands a statue of Abraham Lincoln, this county's, this nation's greatest son. It is a magnificent sculpture of granite and bronze, almost fit for an image of a god. It is not only beautiful and grand, but it stands out there a glowing model to the young manhood of this town. It is hoped that our sons and sons' sons may see in it a guide post to grander and nobler lives. It is hoped that when the mean spirit rises up within us, and we are about to do that which is wrong, we can look up to this heavenly image, and the evil will vanish from us; for, indeed, the person

who can look up at the image of this great man, and think of his kind and generous heart, and still be mean, must be a wicked and depraved soul.

When I stood a few days ago and gazed at this magnificence, I thought about the career of the greatest man that ever lived. In my imagination I saw him while yet a boy in the forest of Kentucky, around the fireside of the cabin with his father and mother. I saw him leave that cabin when he started to Indiana. And I saw him look back through his tear-stained eyes a last sad look at his childhood home. I saw him on the flatboat down the Mississippi. I saw him in Illinois, in the fields and woods, and afterwards in the school house. I saw him behind the counter at New Salem, and I saw him chasing the Black Hawks in the Northwest. I saw him in Springfield, a rising young

lawyer, united to his Kentucky bluegrass bride. And I saw him in the memorable debates with Stephen A. Douglas, where intellect against intellect swayed like the waves of the sea, and Douglas went down and Lincoln came up. I saw him in the White House in Washington, during the blackest of the Civil War, when this government was like a tottering throne; and amid the cries and screams of the battlefield, I heard his calm voice saying: "A government of the people, by the people, and for the people." And I said to myself, that man will live when time's destroying arm has crumbled that statue to dust.

IV.

One early May morning I stepped off a train and found myself between a lot of passenger trains. I was in the city of Louisville, or more accurately speaking, I was in the car-yards of the Union Depot. A convincing evidence of that fact was the offensive odor of coal smoke, which is not at all uncommon in such places; and then there was the ding, ding of the bells, and the hiss and thud of escaping steam from the big engines which so unavoidably attracted my attention. Great iron horses of unwieldy power and strength, each one seemingly trying to out do the other in disturbing the peace of the early morning. When I had done with the car yards, and was in the heart of

the city, the most rivaled habitation of our State, there were still unpleasantries that nauseated me; for in addition to the coal smoke and noise, there were the grocery stores half filled with rotten fruit and vegetables. And then there were the wholesale whisky houses and saloons. Uh! The sensation went through me when I passed, and I wondered how they could ever tempt a young soul to hell. Passing still farther on, I smelt the unwholesome odor of the butcher shop, and again had to hold my nose—spoilt fish, dried herrings hanging up on the outside for sale, and half picked chickens black with dirt and coal soot; skunk hides, dead rats, and a thousand other rotten things filled the air with unpleasant odors. The passers-by did not have that radiant sparkle in their eyes and cheeks—the barometer of health and vigor, but

were pale, dark and swarthy under the eyes. Sick from the impurities, hungry for pure wholesome air. The streets were crowded with these sickly people, of different ages as well as different sex, each one hurrying along with their little dinner boxes to their respective places of labor. Some, who perhaps had but recently drifted into these channels of life, were not so deathly looking as others, but they all wore that same sad look which indicated that they had seen better days. As I stood and gazed upon these pathetic specters of cramped life in our metropolis, I could not help but think that happy is he who pitches his tent on the brink of a country town.

The next morning, in the quiet little town of Hodgenville, I took my morning walk, and what a delightful morning it was. How I did throw my

shoulders back and breathe deep the pure wholesome air. How refreshing and invigorating. At every deep breath I would feel a pleasant sensation run through me like a cool drink of water when hot and thirsty. It was a May morning in Kentucky and what more could be said. Petals of the blossoming orchards were flying here and there like so many snowflakes; the sweet aroma of the lilac and hyacinth perfumed the air; the butterfly and busy bee were at their work, each nimble bee singing in its own language the songs of spring. The green grass added to the life of life, and how clean and tender each blade spiring heavenward like a babe's face smiling up at its mother. Nature in her splendor and beauty lead me on, and before I realized it I was far beyond the town limits. A cool south breeze was bathing the meadow, and

robin redbreast, hard by, with his pleasant melodies caused me to halt, and I noticed that I was in a city of small-winged folks, flitting from tree top to tree top, each one chirping and calling to his mate. A red bird flew up from the meadow, perched on a limb, and after giving me a look as if to question my authority there, shot up his crest, and in his melodious voice said, “Peace, Peace, Peace.”

How delightful and sweet this is, I thought, and why can’t man be like these creatures of God? Why does he pout and sulk over some petty difference; sulk, slander and throw mud in the face of his antagonist; yea, and get down in the mud and fight like curs. Why can’t we poison the Mr. Hyde of our Natures, and just be Dr. Jekyll? Think what it would mean if every man, woman and child could do away with the bad part of

their nature, and be their better self. Do you follow me? If you do, you see our court houses crumbling to the ground, and our multitudinous law books pitched to the dogs. You cease to hear the demagogue politician talking about what we need and what we do not need, and about how bad the other fellow is. You see even more than that; you see that great army of thieves, robbers and whores marching out of their dens of ill-repute into an honest world seeking honest employment. You see their dens cleaned up and painted, and flowers and grass growing where once it would not. You hear prattling lips and happy laughter where once you heard curses and groans. The rotten stink of beer and whisky, vice and turpitude and fumes of hell; the smoke of pistols, and the clatter of bowie-knives are cleared away for happy homes, and peace, peace, peace.

V.

But thank God not all our pastimes are games of chance or games of vice. Some of our girls and boys are having real harmless fun. Over in another part of this town there is a house party, and in still another a moonlight on the lawn, and how they are talking and laughing and having jolly good times. You can see happiness written in every face. You can see pleasure in their smiles, and in the sparkle of their eyes, and hear the ring of joy in their laugh. And it makes you happy to see them happy. There is nothing like fun and real enjoyment; it is the soul and life of us all. There is the happy family around the hearthstone of their home—love, peace, and good will, hope and

encouragement for one and all. There is that little innocent babe smiling up into the fond face of its loving mother; another such picture the world has never known. And then, too, there are the little boys and girls at play in the grass and among the flowers. What a pleasure it is to live, and to love and to be one of God's children.

Let people laugh and have a big time, there is nothing like it. We can't stand a religious crank. It gives us the "Jimjams" to see a person so religiously good they will do nothing but go to church and Sunday-school, and wear a long serious face like they had buried their mother-in-law. But laugh and have fun, it is necessary to health. God does not want us to be sanctified cranks. He gave us this life and expects us to enjoy it, and if our lives are miserable we are to

blame for it ourselves, and are sinners against our maker.

But do not make pleasure the aim and end of it all; rather let pleasure be the result of a well-directed aim. Besides, there is more pleasure in doing something worth while, not for the sake of the honor or the glory in it, nor yet for the sake of the self-sensual pleasure it may give you; but because it needs to be done; because something somehow is calling you to do it. Young men, you can’t all make doctors nor lawyers nor preachers. We can’t all go to Congress. Nor can all of us make J. Pierpoint Morgans, Websters, Napoleons nor John D. Rockefellers. Nor can all you young women make George Elliots or Harriet Beecher Stows. It is not for all of us to win reputations and be popular. God never intended that we should all

reach the top round of the ladder of fame. But we can do even more than that: we can be men and women. We can live a clean and spotless life. We can so live that when the pall of death hovers around us and the light of evening is growing dim, it can be said that the world has been made better by reason of our lives. It is better to live the simple part of a mother, than to travel to Egypt and lecture on ancient Thebes. There is more in giving your brother or fellow townsman a cup of cold water, or in showing some disheartened soul the foot-path to peace. Every day you help to mold the character of some one who follows you. There are girls and boys looking at you as their pattern. It is a question of up or down. The development of the human race fluctuates like the tides of the sea. Place your criterion on

the rock of ages and take a stand. You may never conquer the world, nor even revolutionize the town of Hodgenville; but you can thank God that you can so live that you will lay foot-prints on the sands of time that some shipwrecked soul may see and take heart again. If it is only one individual your influence for better, it is that many, it may turn his soul from a red hell to a shining star, and maybe he will influence others; and thus start in motion waves for good that will strike the shores of eternity. Such will last, and lift your feet into the Royal Highway of God’s redeemed people.

The big steel locomotive is running at the rate of sixty miles an hour across the plains of Colorado. It is snowing. The little innocent flakes come dancing and twirling joyfully through the air; they light on the

iron railing in front of this engine, and are crushed beneath the weight of its mighty wheels. The big engine laughs to see them light on its boiler and melt into tears; but the little flakes keep falling, and after a while the track is covered with soft snow; and the engine begins to slow down from sixty to a forty-mile gate, and then to a thirty, and ten, and finally to a dead stop. She puffs and blows, but she can go neither forward nor backward. This mighty iron horse is a prisoner of the little snowflakes.

The town Dorth, Holland, is lower than the level of the sea, and is protected from the sea by a large dike or levy. One night that levy broke way, and the sea rushed in and swallowed up the city. The city was never more prosperous than the evening before that flood. Everything was flourishing, and the good people of

that little city went to bed that night with happy and hopeful hearts, but woke next morning in a watery grave. Thousands of homes and lives were lost; and the civilized world went down in mourning through sympathy over the terrible catastrophe. What was the cause of this awful destruction? A little muskrat dug a hole in the dike. It was a small hole, and could have been stopped with a handful of mud, but it was neglected, and the water from the sea kept running through, and making its way larger, until at last the whole dam gave way, and the water rushed in on the happy people of that little city while they were asleep.

They are little things,—snow-flakes and muskrats. So is a smile, a kind word, a helping hand or a cup of water. But it is the little things in this world that make big things.

If we can't do the big things, we can do the little things, and if we will do them well, we can do great things. If we can't live in big cities and be millionaires, we can live in small towns and be good citizens.

"Be glad to live because it gives you a chance to love and to work and to play, and to look up at the stars. Be satisfied with your possessions, but not contented with yourself until you have made the best of them. Despise nothing in the world except cowardice. Be governed by your admiration, rather than by your disgust, and let your admiration be high and lofty. Covet nothing that is your neighbor's except his kindness of heart and gentleness of manner. Think seldom of your enemies, often of your friends, and every day of God. And spend as much time as you can, with body and spirit, in God's out-of-

doors.” The splendors of this beautiful world are ours; the beautiful fields and skies are our home; the fields and picturesque landscapes bursting forth into verdant meadows, blushing fruits and yellow harvests should thrill our hearts with the love of life, and the hope of an exalted future.

It is exhilarating to know that there are some such people in Hodgenville; that there are people here who are virtuous, and have clean thoughts, and whose presence refines and purifies; that there are people here whose actions are not governed by the love of money or personal enjoyment; nor do they do what they do because they want to go to Heaven, nor because they are afraid of Hell; but rather because it is right, and they love God. Not an imaginary god who sits on a golden throne and

wears boots and whiskers, but the real God of all gods: The God that's in the sunshine, and in the oxygen of the air; the God that's in the running streams, in the sap of yonder tree, and in the blades of the grass on the hill; the God that courses up the stalk of that flower, opens its bud into a blossoming rose, and sends out its fragrance to refresh the passer-by; the God that runs machines, that runs my machine and your machine; the God that moves our life-blood through all the hidden channels of our bodies, and makes us see, taste, move, and love.

Not but that some of us will go considerably out of our way for a silver dollar, but in the midst of this chopping sea of civil life, such are the clouds and storms and quicksands, and a thousand and one items to be allowed for, that a man has to live,

if he would not flounder and go to the bottom. But in Hodgenville you have friends who are your friends, not because they hate your enemies, nor do you have to continually court them lest your enemies take them from you, but they are your friends because you have a common idea of what is right and what is wrong.

But after all, the good and the bad, the just and the unjust, so far as life here is concerned, it doesn’t make any more difference when Utah was admitted to the Union, than it does who murdered Julius Caesar; for we soar but little higher in our intellectual flights than the columns of our daily paper. There are those, it’s true, who know that Napoleon lost the battle of Waterloo, least wise they have heard it, but they don’t know whether Maeterlinck was the

author of the Declaration of Independence or a "tooth-dentist."

Life in small towns is life in the country, life in the city. It's between the two; and so on around the world, life is pretty much the same, just different ways of living it. Anywhere and everywhere it's sweet as nitrous oxide; the fisherman dripping all day over a cold pond, the farmer in the field, the negro in the rice swamp, the fop in the street, the hunter in the woods, the barrister with the jury, the belle at the ball, all ascribe a certain pleasure to their employment, which they themselves give it. Health and appetite impart a sweetness to butter, bread, and meat. We fancy that our civilization has got on far, but we still come back to the primer.

In LaRue County, on a cold snowy morning, smoke can be seen curling

out of the tops of chimneys. If you will enter the cabins and huts from whence this smoke comes you will see a picture of backwoods realistic: A stout good-humored housewife holding a healthy dirty-faced baby in one arm and churning with the other; the rustic husband in one corner with a cob pipe in his mouth, looking lazily at the fire and boiling kettle. Around the fire are five or six larger children playing and romping like overgrown hound puppies.

This may not be a familiar scene to some, and yet there are many men in the world who came from just such firesides; and though they have been away for ten, twenty, or thirty years, the picture is still vivid before them. And there are times when they would like to go back to this rural life and have their memory refreshed; times when they see the hard reality

of things about which they have been dreaming; when some unexpected catastrophe springs up, stares them in the face and makes them realize that the road up is one continuous struggle. When we who have come from these rude homes, advance that far that we begin to discover that out in the live world everybody is after the almighty dollar, down in our throats is a heavy something that we can't quite swallow; it is the instinctive yearning for the faith and frolic of our childhood.

You may not be thinking of such a scene, or you may never have had such a thought; if not you have never been there and lived that close with nature. To those who were born, lived and died in the LaRue County Hills that's about all there is to it, but be born and raised there and then emigrate to the more civilized parts,

and you are like some wild beast that has been caught, but never tamed. That instinctive yearning for the primitive is always in you, and sometimes it riles up involuntary, and you snarl, growl and strike the cage; but there is no going back, except on the wings of memory, to your yesterdays.

But life creeps along from point to point along a line that’s nameless as the thing that makes you what you are, and whether on Coney Island or in Hodgenville there is no way of telling how it happened, or of how it could have been otherwise. We somehow live, and get along, and about as well one place as another; for it is the other place after all that makes us want to live and go galloping on. Life is a struggle, whether in Liverpool, Cuxhaven or Fairthorn. And times are always hard, whether under a Democratic or Republican adminis-

tration. Some men give up the ghost where others go on and conquer. The thing to do is keep kicking, and you will finally land or go to the bottom. The result of the one is about equal to the other; there is no difference after we are dead and gone to the devil. All our yesterdays have lighted fools the way to dusty death; but the weary world wags on in the wake of its gray to-morrows.

Christmas comes, and with it the firecrackers, skyrockets, roman candles and torpedoes. We fairly take the roof off our town, we are so glad that Christ was born, lived and died to save a world. We are so happy over it that we are just pounding each other with snowballs, if there is any snow to pound with; if not, then with footballs or boxing gloves. Old men stand by and watch it; church deacons, preachers and town

and county officials stand on the corners and see this battling well done, if they can keep out of it themselves. But let’s not watch these Christmas frolics too long; it’s contagious. Let’s go up Main street, and turn out Highland avenue toward the County Jail. There we will see men spying through their little iron-barred window to get a peep at the “Merry Christmas” that’s being so generously scattered abroad. We might stop here and write a book about this jail, “whose walls are strong.” “But the moving finger writes, and having writ, moves on; nor all your piety nor all your wit shall lure it back to cancel half a line; nor all your tears wash out a word of it.”

VI.

And yet, notwithstanding all this, amid the fluctuating scenes of human life, there comes a time, when all, the good and the bad, the wise and the unwise, must stop and gaze with solemn awe at the sad and melancholy spectre of the dead. In the very midst of the gayest hilarity of the ball or lawn party, or while the dice are rattling and vice is running rampant, there is somebody in our little town at the drowning point. Somebody's lamp is going out. And while some of our fellow townsmen are running over with joy at the gay festivities, others are standing by the bedside of a dying friend with tears running down their cheeks, moaning and sobbing over the loss of a departed

soul. What a change of feeling it brings over us when returning from our nightly pastimes we are apprised of the death of a friend or acquaintance. But a few days ago we followed the corpse of one of our young and best citizens to its resting place on the hill. And as we stood around the newly-made grave, listening to the last sad song, how our memories carried us back over the years, and landed us again face to face with her in her many happiest hours. We will long remember her kind heart and gentle manners. But, oh, for the smile of that cold face, or for the sound of that voice that is still! How dismal and dreary it makes us feel to see our dear friend lowered into the ground, and to hear that rattle of the dirt upon the coffin. And then again, when we come back to town, and to the home of the be-

reaved ones; there's the saddest part of it all; there is a chair vacant, a voice silent, a face missing, a member of that heart-aching family gone. Not gone visiting for a few days or weeks, but gone forever; gone to that eternal resting place from whence no one ever returns. Her happy voice and bright smiles will never cheer or brighten that home again.

Sooner or later we will all be summoned to answer the same call. "Perhaps just in the happiest sunniest hour of all the voyage, while eager winds are kissing every sail, we'll be dashed against an unseen rock, and in an instant hear the billows roar above a sunken ship; for whether in mid ocean, or among the breakers of the farther shore, a wreck at last must mark the end of each and all." "But the gay will laugh when thou art gone, and the solemn brood of

care plod on, and each one as before will chase his favorite fantom.” Just now you may be in the very bloom of your glory; you may have friends tried and true; and when you are dead they may gather around your dead body and listen to the funeral sermon. But only a portion of them will follow your corpse to the grave; and a great many of them will have erased you from their memory, ere they have returned to their homes and business. And next summer it will be a few, only a few, who will carry flowers to your grave. Others will have taken your place in their lives, and in the routine of the world; and things will move along about the same as if you had never been. This is not only true with you and with me; but the chief citizen, the most important personage of our municipality, may die to-day, and to-

morrow somebody else will take his place.

In short, coming more direct to the point I have been trying to drive home around the back way; there is no one man, nor any set of men, who own, make or control this burg. In other words, this is no one man's town. There may be individuals, it's true, whose name would suggest to you Hodgenville, but that is because they have always lived here and don't know much else, and not because they own or control the town. For the name Moses Scapegrass or Woodson Huckleberry would suggest to you the town in which they live just as much as would the name William Moffett, John W. Skidpath or Jocelinus de Brakelonda; and yet, each of them are only an individual part of the whole—Hodgenville. "Billy Goat," "George Cooney," and "Uncle John,"

sorry and insignificant as they are, go to make up this town, and fill their part in the great stage of life and action. Rastus, McAdoo, and old man Sam have their part, and so does the town marshal, and the board of trustees; but none of them, nor all of them, are any more the town of Hodgenville than Woodrow Wilson and his appointees are the United States of America. And Woodrow Wilson is no more the United States than is the Rock Island Railroad or the great Shoshone Dam. I have seen boys who thought they were the whole town, and men who thought they were the United States; and I saw one man who thought he was the whole world, till he locked horns with “Boss Barnes” and “Sunnie Jim,” and because he could not throw it over them, stood up in bold silhouette, and said, “I’ll create a world of my own,”

but he foundered. And so this man, like the rest of us, is only part of the whole.

The question is, what part are you? Are you a part of the United States, or are you just a part of your individual town; and if so what part? And do you fill your part? Is your part shedding tears, or do you laugh some, and do you make other people laugh? Is the world, or your town any better, or is any one made happier, or has any one's load been lightened by reason of you? Do you make a good citizen? Does Hodgenville get along any better by reason of you living there? Are your fellow townsmen proud of you, or would they pay your railroad fare one way for a thousand miles to get rid of you, and feel like they had a bargain at that? Are you a chronic knocker, or do you hollo "hurrah" when a good move is made,

whether you had anything to do with it or not? Of course, we all have our part in making the town; whether the fruits of our labor stand out a glowing model for others, or whether it sinks down to shame, a signal warning, we do our part for good or bad. But it is just as easy to be a good citizen as a bad one. As Thoreau said, “We are all sculptors, and our material is our own flesh and blood and bones.” Life is a habit. And to build character we have to make the habit. It is just as easy to get the habit of looking on the bright side as the dark side, if some “tar-heel” has not blacked both sides, as the boy said when he joined the army. It is just as easy to love your town as to hate it.

People! Citizens of Hodgenville!
Fellow townsmen! We all have our faults, and we all have our good

qualities. There is so much good in the worst of us, and so much bad in the best of us. "In men whom men condemn as ill, I find so much of goodness still; and in men whom men pronounce divine I find so much of sin and rot, I hesitate to draw the line between the two where God has not."

God, help us to see ourselves as we are. Help us to see the mote that is in our own eye. Help us to make an inventory of our lives, so that it may stand out before us a plain picture just what we are. Help us to see the good that is in our brother as well as the bad, and when we see the bad that is in the other fellow, teach us to look upon it as a guide post, a signal warning from danger, rather than a lever to drag him further down, or a joke to gloat and chuckle over. Let us see the faults of our little town, but don't stop there, help

us to remedy these faults. Let us all join in one incessant heave at the wheels of progress, and push Hodgenville on and upward into a cleaner and better town. Help us, Almighty God, to love our little town, and above all, to love one another.

VII.

To hear the yelp of the coyote, you must lie alone in the sage brush near the pool in the hollow of the low hills by the moonlight; it will never reach your ears through the bars of the menagerie cage. To know the mountains you must confront the avalanche and precipice unaccompanied, and stand at last on the breathless and awful peak, which lifts itself and you into a voiceless solitude. To comprehend the ocean, you must meet it in its own inviolable domain, where it tosses heavenward its careless nakedness, and laughs with death. But to know and love your town, you must go away from it, out into other distant, unknown places where you can compare them;

or better still, visit all these places, where you can estimate your town's significance, and God's Infinitude.

One autumn evening, several years ago, I was walking along the streets of Portland, Oregon, the farthest from home I had ever been. I had been away from home some two years, and had not received a letter from there for a long time. I was not what you would call "homesick," but just felt as if I would like to see some of the folks, or at least hear from them. I had just struck Portland that afternoon, and was walking up the street, looking at the strange faces; when suddenly the melodious voice of Bernard Hardtlitz, on one of those long-horned graphophones, caught my ear. He was singing "My Old Kentucky Home." It was sweet, and touched me, and I guess the operator must have noticed it, for he put

that other record on. I don't know what you call the piece, but to a Kentucky boy thousands of miles away from home, it is the sweetest song that ever floated out on the still night air:

"I was born and bred in old Kentuck,
In my old Kentucky home.
Then take me back to old Kentuck,
There's where I like's to roam."

Its words and peculiar melody made my hair stand on end. I could see that long-winding stretch of steel rails over the Rocky Mountains, across the great plains, the Mississippi Valley, and into the fields and meadows and apple orchards of Old Kentucky. I reached up and got my hat, tipped it to the operator and graphophone, walked out and down to the station and asked the agent the fare to Louisville. He reached up on

a high shelf, took down a book all covered with soot and cobwebs, and informed me that it was \$56.38. I knew I was a long way from home, but until then I did not realize how far I was in dollars and cents. I thanked him, and walked back up town to see if I could find a place to lay my head. But somehow there was a lump in my throat, a something I could not quite swallow. Me-thinks now that were such my temptations again, I would “mount the rods” or “deck a passenger train” and steal my way back to sweet old Kentucky.

I love Kentucky. I love her fields and skies, her flocks and herds, her blue-grass knobs and picturesque meadows; and I love her virtuous women and brave and fearless men. And best of all Kentucky, I love Hodgenville, that little town on the banks of the clear and serene Nolyn.

That little town near which I was born, and grew up to be a man. Where I have my friends and I have my enemies, where I've had my ups and I've had my downs. That little town on the side of the hill, where the rain falls, and the sun shines and the breezes blow; and above all, where God still lives. She has her faults, she has her dirty dives it's true, and she has her frailties yet to mend; but take her all in all, for men and women, good and bad, for happy homes and loving hearts, it's next to the best place the good Lord ever made.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 014 571 888 0